

## **Henry Dearborn to State Governors, January 17, 1809, Circular Letter , from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.**

### **CIRCULAR LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY OF WAR TO THE GOVERNORS<sup>2</sup>**

2 Drafted by Thomas Jefferson.

January 17, 1809.

Sir, —The pressure of the embargo, though sensibly felt by every description of our fellow citizens, has yet been cheerfully borne by most of them, under the conviction that it was a temporary evil, and a necessary one to save us from greater and more permanent evils,—the loss of property and surrender of rights. But it would have been more cheerfully borne, but for the knowledge that, while honest men were religiously observing it, the unprincipled along our sea-coast and frontiers were fraudulently evading it; and that in some parts they had even dared to break through it openly, by an armed force too powerful to be opposed by the collector and his assistants. To put an end to this scandalous insubordination to the laws, the Legislature has authorized the President to empower proper persons to employ militia, for preventing or suppressing armed or riotous assemblages of persons resisting the custom-house officers in the exercise of their duties, or opposing or violating the embargo laws. He sincerely hopes that, during the short time which these restrictions are expected to continue, no other instances will take place of a crime of so deep a die. But it is made his duty to take the measures necessary to meet it. He therefore requests you, as commanding officer of the militia of your State, to appoint some officer of the militia, of known respect for the laws, in or near to each port of entry within your State, with orders, when applied to by the collector of the district, to assemble immediately a sufficient

## Library of Congress

force of his militia, and to employ them efficaciously to maintain the authority of the laws respecting the embargo, and that you notify to each collector the officer to whom, by your appointment, he is so to apply for aid when necessary. He has referred this appointment to your Excellency, because your knowledge of characters, or means of obtaining it, will enable you to select one who can be most confided in to exercise so serious a power, with all the discretion, the forbearance, the kindness even, which the enforcement of the law will possibly admit,—ever to bear in mind that the life of a citizen is never to be endangered, but as the last melancholy effort for the maintenance of order and obedience to the laws.